



## Archeology ... A Window To The Past



### Introduction

Archeology deepens our understanding of humanity and society. It uplifts us by satisfying our basic desire to know who we are. Artifacts and features do more than represent material from the past. They orient us to our place in the world.

### Charles Pinckney

Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, comprised of 28 acres, preserves a remnant of the 715-acre plantation that Charles Pinckney owned during our nation’s formative years. Pinckney was a delegate to the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, slave owner, four-time governor of South Carolina, ambassador to Spain, and officer in the South

Carolina militia. As a prominent South Carolinian, he played an important role in framing our nation’s Constitution. He was a leader in the years that followed, when a loose organization of former British colonies evolved into a powerful democratic nation: the United States of America.

### Snee Farm Archeology

Unfortunately, no standing structures remain from Pinckney’s time and most of the Pinckney family papers were destroyed by the 1861 Charleston fire. But through archeology we are beginning to learn more about this site and others like it.

While many volumes have been written chronicling the development of the Constitution, little is known about many of its authors, and even less of the enslaved Africans who worked on farms like this.

Archeology of the South Carolina Lowcountry explores the lifestyles of all inhabitants - slave owner and slave alike. It gives particular insight into the culture of the slaves who spent most of their lives on plantations. It is a way to fit slavery into the larger social and cultural context of American history and the rice economy of South Carolina’s past. Artifacts from Snee Farm provide the record with rich and unbiased sources of evidence about everyday plantation life.

### Foundations Tell The Story

Archeological investigations have been conducted at Snee Farm since 1987. The excavations, covering an area of almost 10,000 square feet, have uncovered numerous remains from the Pinckney era.

In 1987 Brockington and Associates uncovered a major portion of the slave community and a plant nursery, and indicated where other 18th century structures were located. An investigation by the Friends of Historic Snee Farm in 1991 confirmed that the present house was probably built around 1828, after Charles Pinckney sold the farm in 1817. National Park Service excavations since 1991 have found a Pinckney-era kitchen, well, and what may be slave dwellings near the present day house. The University of South Carolina archeology field school located another possible slave dwelling and smoke house in 1995. In 1999, remains of the Pinckney farmhouse were conclusively found under the present house.

Based on archeological evidence and some documentation, archeologists now believe that the Pinckney-era structures may have been damaged by severe hurricanes. They were probably razed around 1828, when William Matthews purchased the farm, and the current house was constructed on the same site as Pinckney’s.



Excavation of 18th century well, 1995.

## Pinckney’s Snee Farm

*“I must apologize for asking you to call at a place so indifferently furnished. It is a place I seldom go to, or things, perhaps would be in better order.”*  
– Governor Charles Pinckney to President George Washington, 1791.

Despite Pinckney’s modesty, archeological excavations revealed that his farmhouse measured 32 x 36 feet and contained at least four rooms and a central hall. Paint chip analysis indicates that the rooms were painted blue, yellow, rose and white; one room was decorated with a black stripe. Brass tacks and a brass drawer pull suggest that furnishings included upholstered chairs and sofas, and fine cabinets, desks or tables.

Excavations of the well provided a large collection of 18th and early 19th century artifacts including



Chinese porcelain, fine French and English tableware, Colonoware (African American made pottery), wine and liquor bottles, and cutlery. Personalized wine bottle seals from the kitchen and a silver spoon monogrammed with Pinckney’s parents’ initials provide conclusive evidence of the family’s use of the site. The archeological evidence presents a picture of a central locality characterized by the main house and its supporting facilities separated by several hundred yards from the slave village to the southwest. The main house complex was surrounded by formal gardens with the slave village adjacent to the cropland. The arrangement is typical for this time in the Lowcountry.

## What Is Archeology?

Archeology is the study of artifacts, used, modified, or made by man. It is toiling in the sun on excavations in the deserts of Egypt, diving on Spanish wrecks off the coast of Florida, digging in groves of cedar trees in Frederica, Delaware, and the fertile grounds of Snee Farm, South Carolina. It is also the painstaking task of analyzing thousands

of artifacts and their uses to better understand the human story. A clearer picture of how things really were and a more complete understanding of the past is gained when archeological studies are combined with old documents and maps, pictures, and oral tradition than by the use of any of these tools alone.

## Tools Of The Trade

National Park Service archeologists have used various documentary sources to determine the ownership, location, and likely appearance of the Pinckney farmhouse and garden. Computer assisted mapping allows various historic plats of Snee Farm to be overlaid on a modern map of the area, revealing valuable information and sometimes providing clues to possible unknown excavation sites. New technology, such as ground-penetrating radar, often allow archeologists to find the location of features without digging, but shovels, trowels and other hand tools are the most often used.

When complete, analysis of the more than 150,000 artifacts recovered to date will shed significant light on life at Snee Farm.



Archeologists use ground-penetrating radar at Snee Farm.

## The Future

Archeology on a site like Snee Farm offers an opportunity for a more accurate interpretation of slave life, including the quantity and quality of food, housing, medical care and free time that was available to slaves. It also provides a better understanding of the everyday lives of everyone involved: the enslaved Africans, the generations that followed them, and the plantation owners.

Additional work is needed in the area of the slave

community to conclusively define its size and configuration, and the role it played at Snee Farm. Further investigations are also needed in the east yard to better understand the history of the farm and the role it played in shaping the life of one of our nation’s most important early leaders.

As it surfaces, new information is incorporated into exhibits, publications and programs at the site to keep visitors informed about these discoveries.

## About Your Visit

Charles Pinckney National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. The site is located on Long Point Road in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Hours of operation are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily, except for January 1 and December 25.

For more information, write the Superintendent, Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, 1214 Middle Street, Sullivan’s Island, SC 29482, call (843) 881-5516, or visit us on the World Wide Web:

<http://www.nps.gov/chpi>